

A BLIND ENGINEER.—The history of John Metcalf is a singular and interesting one. In a sketch of his life, lately given in an article on "The Curiosities of Eccentric Biography," in *Bentley's Miscellany*, we find the following particulars, which we think worth condensing:—He was born in 1717, at Knaresborough. At the age of six years he was seized with small-pox, which deprived him of sight. In about three years he could find his way alone to any part of Knaresborough. He became very expert in swimming, and saved the lives of some companions. As he grew older he could find his way well over the country, and carried persons through "short cuts" and fords in the river with no difficulty. Travellers, whose guide he became, were led quite safely by him, through the night, in most dangerous roads, to the point of their destination, totally unconscious of his want of vision. His most remarkable occupation was road-making. Among the numerous roads which Metcalf contracted to make was part of the Manchester road from Blackmoor to Standish-foot. The surveyor took it over deep marshes. To dig till they came to a solid bottom appeared to Metcalf extremely tedious and expensive, and liable to other disadvantages. He therefore argued the point privately with the surveyor, and ultimately got the job of its construction. Having engaged to complete nine miles in ten months, he began in six different parts, having nearly four hundred men employed. Pole and Standish Common, a deep bog, was thought impracticable. The water he carried off by drains, but found the greatest difficulty in conveying stones to the spot. Having levelled the piece to the end, he ordered his men to collect heather or ling, and bind it in round bundles. These were placed close together, and another row laid over them, upon which they were well pressed down, and covered with stone and gravel. This piece, being about half a mile in length, when completed was so remarkably good, that any person might have gone over it in winter unshod without being wet; and though other parts of the road soon wanted repairs, this needed none for twelve years.* To his road-making he added bridge-building, and constructed that at Boroughbridge with credit to himself. He continued his business of making roads and building and repairing bridges in Yorkshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, and Cheshire, with great success, until the year 1782, when he returned to Yorkshire. He died in 1802, in his eighty-fifth year.

NEW PATENTS.—The following, amongst others, have been recently granted: To H. Grissell, of Regent's-canal Iron Works, Mid-dlesex, engineer, and T. Redwood, of Montague-street, in same county, professor of chemistry, for improvements in coating metals with other metals.—To T. Allan, of Glasgow, ironfounder, for certain improvements in paving or covering roads, streets, and other surfaces of a similar nature.—To G. Anstey, of Brighton, gentleman, for certain improvements in consuming smoke, and in regulating the draught of chimneys.—To C. Barlow, of Chancery-lane, for improvements in machinery for the manufacture of railway chairs,—and to R. Cogan, Leicester-square, glass-merchant, for improvements in the application of plain or ornamental glass alone, or in combination with other suitable materials, to new and useful purposes of construction or manufacture.

CONTRACTS FOR STONE.—In the Sheffield County Court, on the 1st inst. (before W. Walker, Esq., Judge), an action was brought by Mr. Peter Spooner, of Hallamgate, against Messrs. Pickard and Ogden, of Bradford, the contractors of the new barracks, to recover 27*l.* 15*s.* 9*d.*, as compensation for a quantity of stone got out of the quarry belonging to the plaintiff, and for the cost of erecting a fence round the quarry. It appeared that the defendants had agreed to purchase 600 yards of stone from Mr. Spooner, at 2*s.* 3*d.* per yard surface measurement, one-fourth of the money to be paid down, and the remaining three-

quarters as the stone became exhausted. A regular contract to this effect was drawn up by Mr. Wake, solicitor; but the contractors having in the mean time proceeded to get stone, and finding it to be not so good in quality as they had expected, refused to sign the contract. They continued to work the quarry until they had bared nearly 250 yards. The action was brought by Mr. Spooner to recover for the number of yards of stone according to the original purchase. Mr. Freaton, who appeared for the contractors, objected that the contract was within the Statute of Frauds, and therefore could not be enforced. Mr. Dixon, for the plaintiff, urged that the case was taken out of the statute, the contractors having taken away stone. The Judge decided that the case was so taken out of the statute, but conceived that all Mr. Spooner would be able to recover would be for only so much of the stone as had been obtained by the defendants. Evidence was then gone into, and ultimately the Judge decided that the contractors should pay to the plaintiff the sum of 13*l.* 13*s.* for the stone, and costs of the action.

DISPUTED CONTRACT FOR TILES.—At the Birmingham County Court lately, a case (*Blakesley v. Glenn*) came on for trial, a second time, as to some tiles intended for the new workhouse at Birmingham-heath. The action was brought to recover the sum of 47*l.* 0*s.* 11*d.* for 33,000 brinded tiles, at the price of 27*s.* 3*d.* per 1,000, supplied by Mr. Blakesley, to Mr. Fryar, Mr. Glenn's manager. Mr. Blakesley and Mr. Glenn had entered into a written contract, by which the former agreed to supply the latter with 30,000 blue tiles, at a given price, according to sample. The plaintiff was an agent, and dealt with a Mr. Warner, tile-manufacturer, Trent Vale Works, Newcastle-under-Lyme. Mr. Blakesley admitted that one condition of this contract was, "that the tiles must be to the satisfaction of the clerk of the works." Three weeks afterwards, according to plaintiff's testimony, he saw Mr. Fryar, defendant's manager, and as the blue tiles could not be delivered so soon as they were required, a new contract was entered into between himself and Fryar (for defendant), for which brinded tiles, at 27*s.* 3*d.* per 1,000, were to be substituted, or to be furnished forthwith in lieu (for the present) of the blue tiles. It was not denied that Fryar had power to make contracts. Mr. Blakesley went on to say, that he then gave Mr. Fryar a sample of the brinded tiles, keeping a similar one himself, and that within a short time these latter articles came to the works in two boats. The evidence led as to what then took place was flatly contradictory. For plaintiff, a boatman swore that Mr. Fryar not only gave permission for landing, but said, "I'll have them: they might have been bluer; but they'll do for the back of the buildings." For the defendant it was deposed that Fryar said, "The tiles are not according to order: they will not do, nor shall they come upon the ground at all." Other witnesses, including Mr. Glenn himself, Mr. Harrison, attorney for plaintiff, and Mr. Husband, clerk of works, also gave contradictory evidence. Mr. Davis, a Slater for twenty-five years, deposed on behalf of plaintiff that the tiles in dispute were equal to what were being actually used at the works, and "that there was not a blue tile on the whole building." This statement both Mr. Glenn and Mr. Husband denied. Samples of the different tiles were then shown to the jury, and the judge, in summing up, said the questions were—was there a substituted contract by Fryar in place of that made with Mr. Glenn? then, if so, were the brinded tiles sent in accordance with such substituted contract? After three-quarters of an hour's consultation, the jury came into court with a verdict for the defendant.

Gas.—A correspondent at Baldock says,—"your journal is doing much towards the enlightenment of our houses and streets: may it continue doing so. The Royston Gas Company up to last Christmas charged 10*s.* per 1,000 feet. They have now reduced it to 7*s.* with a reduction of 25 per cent. on the street lamps. Their coke sold at 38*s.* per ton: it now sells for 16*s.* A branch of the Great Northern Railway runs into the town, and supplies them with the Yorkshire coals at a reduction of about 8*s.* per ton on the price they usually gave."—"The corporate town

of Ruthin, in Wales," says a contemporary, "has followed the example of Southport in adopting Mr. White's gas. Mr. White has contracted to light forthwith the beautiful and romantic town of Dunkeld, Perthshire, including, we believe, the Duke of Athol's palace, contiguous to it. The extensive mills of Messrs. Geo. Clarke and Sons, Pollard-street, Manchester, having 1,600 lights (many hundreds of which are burning all day), are supplied by one set of apparatus, consisting of two resin and two water retorts, placed in one small furnace, only 4 feet 3 inches of inside width, and this easily and amply supplies the whole, equal to the consumption of many a town. We have made some inquiries as to the cost of this gas, where 200 or 300 lights are required, and are informed that from one cwt. of resin, costing in Liverpool 3*s.* to 3*s.* 3*d.*, 1,800 to 2,000 feet of gas are obtained, besides three gallons of residual oil, for which a wholesale house in Manchester will give 7*d.* per gallon, or 1*s.* 9*d.* for every cwt. of resin used, and pay the carriage. The price of the gas is, therefore, an easy calculation. The commissioners at Southport refuse to take 7*d.* per gallon, saying they can make more of it."

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND MUSEUMS.—Although we have occasionally noted the various provisions and particulars of the Act for the Establishment of Public Libraries and Museums by Town Councils, we think the present a very fitting time to follow the example of a contemporary, the *Gateshead Observer*, in reannouncing its principal points. The statute is that of 13 & 14 Vict. cap. 65, and received the Royal assent on 14th August, 1850. It applies to all boroughs having a population exceeding ten thousand persons. As a condition precedent to its adoption, the town council must have the sanction of a majority of two-thirds of the burgesses. The votes are to be taken in the manner of a municipal election; and if the decision be adverse, the question cannot be re-opened for two years. If favourable, the town council may purchase or hire lands or buildings, and erect, extend, or alter them, for the purpose of forming libraries or museums of art and science. The requisite moneys are to be raised by a rate, but the rate must not exceed one halfpenny in the pound for each year. Money may also, with the sanction of the Treasury, be raised on mortgage of the rate. The same raised may be applied to providing rooms, fixtures, furniture, fuel, lighting, officers, &c. The library and museum must come from other sources. The public to be admitted without charge. It is calculated, we may add, that wherever a proper building is thus provided for, there will be no difficulty in very shortly collecting, even by gifts, bequests, &c., alone, a very creditable library as well as museum.

THE SMITHFIELD NUISANCE AND ITS EXTENSION.—A special vestry was held last week in the parish of St. James, Westminster, to consider the propriety of petitioning Parliament against the Bill promoted by the corporation of London for continuing on or near the present site the cattle-market of Smithfield, Mr. Geein, chairman. Mr. Nelson moved that a committee be appointed to prepare a petition. It might be asked, he said, what the parishioners of St. James's had to do with the question of Smithfield. They were not on the high road for cattle to the market, but when they were in the city they were liable, like others, to be inconvenienced: they were also likely to be seriously affected by a Bill, the effect of which would be to raise the present tolls 300 per cent. He contrasted the description of Smithfield in 1614, when it was a place of public amusement, with the account of it given in Mr. Conningham's hand-book at the present time. The corporation having been, as it were, convicted of keeping a disorderly house, and ordered to suppress it, had complied with the sentence by removing next door. The contemplated lairs were for 1,000 cattle and 5,000 sheep. These, packed as closely as possible, would require two acres of space at least; whereas the extent of lairage provided for in the new plan was barely half an acre. The proposal for shutting the market when the ordinary traffic of the streets would be disturbed by it, was impracticable. The estimated expense of the new plan was 500,000*l.*, and it included the removal of 541 houses, four

* This method, and a similar one with branches of trees or other timber, we had repeatedly occasion to recommend while the great railway works were in progress throughout the country, and often, after repeated failures with heavier materials, it had at length to be resorted to, and always successfully. Post-bog, we may here also remark, is a singular preservative of timber, trees, or other vegetable matter, and doubtless this peculiar property of bogs insures the permanency of such light structures thrown across them.